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THE PHILOSOPHY OF Divine Revelation NO *Argument of Impoſture.*

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF Divine Revelation NO *Argument of Impoſture.*

PRIVATE Judgment is the common Right of Mankind, their only Security againſt Falſhood and Deception, and the beſt Means of diſcovering and finding out the Truth; And, indeed, the

the Light is never ſo clear and ſtrong, as when we ſtrike it up within our Minds by impartial Reaſoning; then may we be ſaid to be in the Light, and to walk in the Light.

IN Matters of a religious Concern, free Debate and Enquiry are abſolutely neceſſary; The natural Weight and Moment of the Things themſelves, together with the Danger of being miſled by Impoſture on the one Hand, and by Enthuſiaſm on the other, are ſufficient Arguments for a ſtrict Examination. Our having once received any Revelation upon what appears to be the proper Evidence of a divine Authority, can, by no Means, excuſe us from anſwering ſuch Objections as may happen afterwards to be propoſed: The Things objected to, might have eſcaped our firſt Notice and Obſervation; and even tho' what is alledged be without Ground, yet, for the Conviction of others, it deſerves to be conſidered and removed.

FROM

FROM the late Improvements in Learning, ſeveral Objections have been made, to deſtroy the Credit of the *Sacred Books*, particularly, *That they teach Mankind a falſe System of the World, in Compliance with the common Prejudices and Miſtakes of the Vulgar.* *Copernicus* may be allowed the firſt who gave Riſe to any Scruple of this Kind; But his Hypotheſis, being founded only upon probable Arguments, was not well able to ſtand in Oppoſition with the Sacred Philoſophy, 'till Sir *Iſaac Newton* appeared, and, by a juſt Method of Reaſoning, eſtabliſhed the ſame Hypotheſis in Experiment and Obſervation: Then, indeed, it was evident, that the Scripture Accounts of the Laws and Operations of Nature were agreeable only unto the ſenſible Appearances of Things; and, conſequently, were not to be defended by any Topicks which could prove them to be juſt and true in themſelves.

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A late ingenious Author affirms, that *the* Hebrew *Writings of the Old Teſtament have never been, and are not now truly tranſlated, or perfectly underſtood by thoſe who pretend to be learned; and, that rightly underſtood and tranſlated, they compriſe in them a juſt and compleat System of Natural Philoſophy.* The Principles he lays down in order to prove the Truth of theſe Propoſitions, were they admitted, would demonſtrate the true Reading and Signification of the Original Language to be irrecoverably loſt. The *Greek*, and other ancient Verſions, he alledges, were made ſome Time after the genuine Senſe of a great many Words and Phraſes had been entirely forgotten: And the Vowel Points are, in his Opinion, a *Jewiſh* Invention, fitted up, on Purpoſe, not to preſerve the true Reading, as is generally thought; but to eſtabliſh and ſupport ſome corrupt and falſe Doctrines, with which that Nation was deeply prepoſſeſſed. By ſuch an Account of Things, there is no certain

certain Tradition for the true Sound or Meaning of the Language; and, conſequently, the Books themſelves ought to be laid aſide, as obſcure and dubious Oracles, from which we who live at this Diſtance of Time, can, with no Safety, conclude any Thing relating either to Faith or Manners. Theſe, and the like Conſequences, do naturally follow, upon our Author's Conceſſions; ſo that, his new Scheme, I am afraid, will be attended with much greater Difficulties than the Method which is generally received; and which can be juſtified, upon very ſufficient Grounds, as being the only Way of reading and underſtanding theſe Writings that has been tranſmitted down to us by Tradition; which we may very well believe to be pure and genuine, from the Care the *Jewiſh* Nation muſt have taken in preſerving their Religion, and the Language in which it was revealed, ſince they were of the Opinion, that both were equally of a Divine Origin. That this Conjecture, ſo probable in itſelf, is true in Fact,

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can't be doubted, being confirmed by the concurrent Teſtimonies of Hiſtorians of good Credit, and by ſufficient Documents yet extant; ſuch as, the *Maſorethick Writings*, Works of inimitable Labour, and compoſed with great Art, to preſerve the *Hebrew* Text from the ſmalleſt Corruption: So ſtrong was their Inclination to have theſe Books conveyed to Poſterity; and, no leſs, certainly, was their Care and Study, to tranſmit, along with them, the true Reading and Meaning; ſince, otherwiſe, their Endeavours and Labours ſhould have been in vain. Theſe Reaſons may ſerve to ſhew the Abſurdity of any Attempt to introduce a new Method of reading and underſtanding the *Hebrew* Scriptures, different from that which is preſently allowed, and which ſtands upon a credible Tradition. Whatever Doctrines therefore they teach us, according to the preſent reading, theſe we muſt receive and defend againſt the Cavils and Exceptions of Unbelievers; and no Argument can be admitted,

mitted, that is inconſiſtent with the traditional Senſe.

THE Anſwer commonly given to the Objection, by thoſe who take the original Language in its uſual Signification, is, that the Things objected to, being *incidental* only, are ſpoken *ad captum humanum*, and accommodated unto the Underſtandings of thoſe to whom they were delivered. A Conſideration, which, if duly weighed, might, perhaps, ſatisfy any unprejudiced Mind. But, however it be, a great many People, we know, continue to heſitate upon this very Point.

THE Force of the Objection, as I humbly conceive, conſiſts in this, *That the ſacred Scriptures contain in them ſuch Accounts of the Laws and Operations of Nature, as are evidently demonſtrated to be* falſe in themſelves; *and therefore inconſiſtent with the Knowledge and Sincerity of*

the Supreme Being, who muſt be allowed to have a perfect Underſtanding of his own Works, and Goodneſs *enough not to deceive his Creatures with deluſive and unjuſt Repreſentations of them; eſpecially, when that a Diſcovery of Things, as they are* in themſelves, *would, in this Caſe, been of great Uſe and Importance unto Mankind, and given them better Notions of the Divine Excellencies and Perfections, than, poſſibly, they can have by any other Means.*

THE Difficulty, placed in this Light, is far from being frivolous and trifling, and has one Advantage, whereof no other can boaſt, *viz.* As it accuſes *Divine Revelation* with erroneous and falſe Doctrines, that are acknowledged to be ſo. To account, *a priori*, for the divine Conduct, in teaching ſuch Things, will be exceeding difficult; and, perhaps, this may be one Reaſon why the Solutions that have been propos'd, don't carry ſufficient Conviction along with 'em. Was there

there *any ſimilar Inſtance*, or *any natural Conſtitution*, of ſuch an Affinity and Relation unto the Caſe in Hand, as, that the divine Conduct, in both, might juſtly be compar'd together, and ſhewn *to be one and the ſame*; then it would appear to be very poſſible, that *the Supreme Being, who is the Author of the one, may alſo be the Author of the other.* That there is an Analogy of this Kind, is what I am to prove: And, in order to ſet the Argument in the cleareſt Light I can, I ſhall diſtinguiſh it into ſo many ſingle Propoſitions.

I. THE *Author* of our Nature has fram'd us with Organs of Senſe, by which he *conveys* into our Minds the Knowledge of external Objects. In this Manner only, we come to underſtand the various Properties and Relations of Bodies; and whatever Ideas of theſe are deriv'd by Impreſſions from the Things themſelves, they are *neceſſary* and *unavoidable*, even as the Effects of *natural* Cauſes:

Cauſes: So that we muſt perceive them as we do, without being able to deſtroy or alter them, while the external Action, whereby they are excited, continues to be the ſame in all Reſpects: Our Perceptions of Things without us, therefore, do, all of 'em, in the firſt Inſtance, flow *directly* from Nature.

II. THE *Perceptions of Senſe*, tho' they be communicated from without, and the Mind paſſive in receiving them, yet they are *not*, all of 'em, *juſt Repreſentations* of their Objects; as will appear from particular Inſtances. The Ideas of the *ſecondary* Qualities of Bodies, are only certain Modifications of Thought, and have nothing exiſting in Nature conform unto them: What is ſweet, warm, or blue in our Apprehenſion, is, in the Bodies themſelves, the Bulk, Figure and Motion of their inſenſible Parts; and, as theſe are not diſcernible, ſo neither their Fitneſs to produce in us Senſations, unto which they bear no Reſemblance.

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THE Caſe is not the ſame, in reſpect of the *primary* Properties of Body, ſuch as Extenſion, Solidity, Figure, Motion and Reſt; *in general*, theſe and the like appear unto the Senſes as they really exiſt; and ſo inſeparable are they from any material Subſtance, that, without them, it can't be conceiv'd or imagined: Yet Experience ſhews how far our Perceptions of their ſeveral Modes and Degrees vary from the Truth and Being of Things.

TO begin with *Extenſion*, which ſeems to be firſt in Order, and, when applied unto corporeal Subſtances, is no other than their Bulk and Magnitude, or their Length, Breadth and Depth, taken together. Theſe Dimenſions are perceptible either to our Sight or our Touch; and when Objects are in ſuch a happy Situation, as they may be both ſeen and felt, then are we in the leaſt Danger of being deceiv'd, and can make a tolerable Eſtimate, which, yet, is not to be depended on

on as perfectly exact: And if we are apt to form erroneous Judgments upon the Teſtimonies of both theſe Senſes, concurring together, we may eaſily apprehend how much our Miſtakes will be increas'd, when left unto the Aſſiſtance of any one of 'em, even in the moſt advantagious Poſition. But, ſhould the Objects be removed from us, in that Caſe, their Magnitudes would diminiſh in Proportion, and our Errors, about them, turn ſtill the more conſiderable; We can, indeed, make Allowances in our Minds, according as we know their Diſtances to be greater or ſmaller: But, in what Manner to determine their Diſtances, when we underſtand not their true Bulk, is not eaſy to conceive: And, if their Diſtances are not given, it will be impracticable to meaſure their true Magnitudes with the naked Eye; and, conſequently, where we are ignorant of both, and left to the bare Informations of Senſe, we muſt neceſſarily fall into many groſs Miſtakes about them: Thus, for Inſtance, the heavenly Bodies do, all

all of 'em, appear to be at equal Diſtances from us, and none of 'em ſo remote as they really are; and therefore, we take them to be vaſtly leſs in themſelves, or much bigger, in reſpect of one another, than they really exiſt.

THE ſecond Property of Matter is *Solidity*, which, being always the ſame, and admitting of no different Degrees, we can never miſtake it in any Caſe; yet Bodies there are, ſo very ſubtile and fluid, that, making no ſenſible Reſiſtance to our Touch, we conceive them to be penetrable Subſtances; for this Reaſon, Water and Air were not ſolid, even in the Opinion of the ancient Philoſophers, till, by certain Experiments, the contrary was evidently proven.

THE third Property of corporeal Subſtances is *Figure*, and is no other than the particular Surface or Surfaces under which any Body does exiſt, whereof we can have no Idea,

Idea, unleſs the Object be perceptible, and may be view'd on all Sides, which is not to be done, where the Magnitude is either too big, or too minute, or the Thing itſelf remov'd at too great a Diſtance: In all theſe Caſes, the Shape varies, loſes its true Appearance, and degenerates into a falſe One: For Inſtance, the Globes of the Sun and Moon are apparently plain like the Sections of a Cylinder, and have no ſenſible Curvature, towards our Eye: The Earth alſo, on Account of its vaſt Bulk, inſtead of appearing round and ſpherical, it ſeems rather to be long and broad; we comprehend, in one View, but a ſmall Portion of its real Magnitude; and the ſmall Portion of a large Sphere, we know, produces the Image of a plain Surface; beſides, when we look around us, we ſee Mountains and Valleys; and how a globular Surface can be propagated, through ſuch Inequalities, will not be eaſily underſtood by moſt People.

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LASTLY, *Motion* and *Reſt*, whereof our Senſes can only inform us, are often, thro' a falſe Appearance, miſtaken, the one for the other. Bodies are ſaid to move when they change Place, in reſpect of other Bodies with which they are compar'd: And this Change may be produced with ſuch a Degree of Velocity, or of Slowneſs, as not to be perceiv'd. In the one Caſe, the Body in Motion will be inviſible and quite out of Sight; and, in the other, it will ſeem to ſtand ſtill; and, that it has been moving at all, can only be diſcerned by comparing its Situation in two diſtant Points of Time, which yet, in many Inſtances, cannot be done; as, ſhould two or three Bodies be put into Motion, and continue to preſerve their Places among themſelves, they would, all of them, appear to be at Reſt, provided there were no other Bodies, to which they might be referred. Farther, ſhould a Spectator be plac'd in ſuch a Station, as is actually moving, but feels himſelf partaking of no Motion, he would

imagine the Body, where his Station is, to be fix'd, and at perfect Reſt, while all other Bodies about him would appear to be moving, and that in a contrary Direction: In this Manner, being inſenſible of the Earth's Motion from Weſt to Eaſt, we apprehend the Sun and all the Planets to be moving from Eaſt to Weſt.

THESE and the like Perceptions of the corporeal World are produced and excited in us, by the Operation of Cauſes foreign to the Mind; and, conſequently, muſt be neceſſary and unavoidable, in reſpect of our own Frame, the Nature of the Things themſelves, and their Poſition unto our Senſes; unavoidable, I ſay, during the Continuance of the external Action.

III. Tho' theſe Ideas and Perceptions be neceſſary in the firſt Inſtance, and however falſly they repreſent the Being and Exiſtence of Things, yet Mankind can neither *diſcover* their

their Fallacies, nor be *convinced* by thoſe who have diſcovered them; ſo that they muſt continue to apprehend Things as they do, without ever being *able* to ſee their Errors and Miſtakes. A few Men there are, indeed, of a *Philoſophick Genius*, who have ſtudied Nature, and, by Experiment and Demonſtration, exploded the Conceits of the Vulgar, and given true Accounts of the ſeveral Properties, Laws and Operations of Bodies: But, is it poſſible that ever theſe Things can be made plain and evident unto common Underſtandings; the Knowledge and Certainty thereof depending on Principles too remote, and a Courſe of Reaſoning too intricate to their Conception: So that every Attempt to inſtruct them, in ſuch Matters, muſt prove vain and unſucceſsful. Moſt Men, indeed, without being taught, may know the firſt Rudiments of all Science, *viz.* a few ſelf-evident Propoſitions, and ſome others deducible from them, by an immediate and obvious Conſequence, which they can, by

by ſome Aſſiſtance, apply to the learning the ſeveral Trades and Employments in Life; but are not capable, thro' Want of Time and Opportunities, of carrying their Views much farther: And it is very evident, that, taking Mankind as we find them, they don't admit of Conviction in any Caſe which happens to be contrary unto the expreſs Teſtimony of their Senſes.

IV. The Ideas of Senſation, therefore, as they flow directly from Nature, are, in many Inſtances, falſe and unjuſt Repreſentations of their Objects; nor can they be alter'd and reform'd to the Conviction of the Bulk of Mankind, who muſt conceive of Things as they do, where they have no expreſs Teſtimony of their Senſes, to make them conceive otherwiſe: So that they, *natura duce*, are unavoidably involv'd in many Miſtakes about material and ſenſible Objects, which they can't correct by any Aſſiſtance whatever. Here then is a *Caſe*, where, by a *fixed Law* and

and Conſtitution, and, conſequently, by the *Will of the Supreme Being*, we apprehend the Qualities and Operations of Bodies differently from their real Exiſtence; which is a Fact ſo plain and evident, that it can't well be diſputed: And the Concern which the firſt Cauſe has in it, is ſo great, that he may be ſaid to be as much the *Author thereof*, as he is the *Author of Nature*. Hence we conclude, he may alſo be the Author of a *Revelation*, wherein Things of the ſame Kind are plac'd in a like Light; corporeal Objects, I mean, repreſented as they appear unto the Senſes, even when this Appearance is not agreeable unto their real Exiſtence. In both theſe Caſes, the *divine Conduct* is ſo *conſiſtent* and *analogous* with itſelf, that the Fitneſs of the one muſt ſhew the Fitneſs of the other; and any Objection that can be made againſt either of 'em, muſt equally fall upon both, and be liable unto a juſt Exception of proving too much, *viz.* An Error in the very Frame and Conſtitution of Things,

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and a Blunder in the Works of the Alwiſe God; an Abſurdity allow'd by none but downright Atheiſts, with whom I don't mean preſently to argue. If, then, the Queſtion ſhould be put, How Writings of a divine Authority can be ſuppoſed to contain ſo many falſe Repreſentations of Things? The Anſwer will be, that theſe Repreſentations, ſuch as they are, happen to be no other than what were deriv'd into our Minds, in a natural Way, by Means of our Senſes. Should it be urged, that tho' the Ideas convey'd into our Minds be wrong and unavoidable, in the firſt Inſtance, yet it may be very poſſible to correct and amend them by Reaſon, or by a more perfect Obſervation. To this, it will be enough, to ſay, that the Fallacies of Senſe are of two Kinds, either they are ſuch as are obvious, and evident unto the Bulk of Mankind, or ſuch as are not ſo, and cannot be underſtood by them, even after all the Attention and Application they themſelves are Maſters of, and the moſt particular Inſtruction

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on from others, who, by artificial Helps, and a tedious Courſe of Study, have arrived to the Knowledge of them. Theſe, and theſe only, we affirm, Nature teaches, becauſe, to moſt People, ſhe affords *no better Information*; and theſe are the very Things charg'd on the ſacred Books as *certain Marks of Impoſture.*

MANKIND feel no Motion in the Earth, nor can they perceive it to change its Place, in reſpect of any Point which they take to be immoveable; therefore they imagine, that it is in perfect Reſt, and muſt be the central Body of the whole Syſtem, as ſeeming to be of the greateſt Magnitude, and placed at equal Diſtances from the Heavens, on all Hands, and about which the Sun, Moon and Stars have an apparent Motion. This is the true State of the World, according unto the common Senſe and Judgment of the Vulgar and Illiterate: And, indeed, it is not poſſible they can form any other Notion of it, which,

to them, will have the ſame Degree of Evidence and Certainty.

IN the ſame Manner, the ſacred Writings repreſent the Earth, as hanging upon nothing eſtabliſh'd and fix'd; that it abideth, and removeth not from its Place; the Heavens ſtretch'd above as a Curtain, and the Sun, Moon and Stars running their Courſes, and making a Circuit from the one End thereof unto the other, *Job* xxvi. 7. *Pſalm* civ. 2, 5. *Pſalm* cxix. 90. *Pſalm* xix. 1, — 3.

SUCH an Account of the Syſtem of the World agrees accurately with every ſenſible Appearance: Were it neither true in itſelf, nor true in Appearance, there ſhould be no Room for the ſmalleſt Apology; but ſince this is not the Caſe, it muſt ſtill be a good Defence, to ſay, that our Senſes inform us in the *ſame Manner*: And, however falſe and unjuſt this Information may be, it was all that Mankind had, or could have, *antecedently*

cedently to *Revelation*: And, if the Supreme Being deſign'd they ſhould have had other and better, he would have given them other and more perfect Senſes; or, at leaſt, afforded them Means of correcting theſe they have. Neither of which he hath done; and, conſequently, it may be conſtrued to be his Will, that they ſhould perceive Things as they do: And ſince it was the divine Will, antecedently to *Revelation*, that Mankind ſhould perceive Things as their Senſes might enable them, it muſt be allow'd, that Writings may be from God, which teach the ſame Things, in a like Manner: The Ideas therefore of corporeal Objects, convey'd to us by *Revelation*, being the Continuation of thoſe Ideas which were deriv'd to us by that *Method of Inſtruction*, which was originally eſtabliſh'd in Nature; the Author of *the one* may, very conſiſtently with himſelf, be alſo the Author of *the other*.

IT can't be objected, that, by this Way of reaſoning, a *Divine Revelation* may contain in it any Falſhoods whatever, ſince the Argument all along relates unto material and ſenſible Objects; and in relation to theſe it only concludes.

SHOULD it be alledged, that our Senſes, in many Caſes, have deceiv'd us, and their Deceptions have been diſcover'd, which is a natural Hint to admoniſh us not to truſt unto them at all: 'Tis true, indeed, that ſuch Hints of their Fallacies ought to make us cautious, and careful to examine Matters, but they can never juſtify a perfect Scepticiſm: The ſafeſt Rule which Mankind can obſerve, is, to take the Evidence of Senſe, where *Reaſon*, or a contrary Teſtimony of *Senſe*, doth not deſtroy it to *their Conviction*.

FARTHER, if it was alledged, that the Method of Inſtruction, by the Senſes, is ſo imperfect and deceptious, that it will be difficult

ficult to conceive, how a *Divine Revelation* can comply with it: It will be a ſufficient Anſwer, to ſay, that whatever Reaſons made ſuch a Method of teaching fit to be eſtabliſhed in *Nature*, would, if known, juſtify the Continuance thereof by *a Revelation*: What theſe Reaſons were, we don't pretend to determine: However, there are ſome Conſiderations, which, in our Way of conceiving, may ſerve to give a probable Account of the divine Conduct in this Matter.

I have endeavour'd to prove, that the Author of our Nature derives into our Minds the ſame Ideas of corporeal Objects, in a natural Way, that he conveys to us by *Revelation*; but a great many People, perhaps, may be unwilling to admit the Fact, from ſome Apprehenſions they have, that the Thing is not very agreeable unto the Dignity and Character of the Supreme Being. In order, then, to remove ſuch a Prejudice, it will be neceſſary to give a probable Repreſentation

ſentation of the divine Management: And becauſe the foregoing Argument relates, in a ſpecial Manner, to the Idea we have of the Syſtem of the World, I ſhall, therefore, on this Head, purſue my Enquiry in the ſame View: And, ſince thoſe great Bodies, which belong unto the Syſtem of the World, are generally remov'd at vaſt Diſtances from us, therefore, any Knowledge that poſſibly we can have of them, muſt be deriv'd to us by our Senſe of Seeing: So that, to examine the Fitneſs of the divine Conduct, in conveying unto our Minds ſuch an Idea of the Syſtem of the World, is the ſame Thing, as to enquire into the Fitneſs of that particular Degree of Viſion which the Author of our Nature has given us.

I. EVERY Man's own Experience muſt convince him of the Excellence and Uſefulneſs of this Senſe, imperfect as it is: He is thereby ſufficiently directed in all the voluntary Motions of the ſeveral Members of his Body,

Body, and in their proper Applications unto external Objects: He is alſo guided in diſcovering and acquiring thoſe Things that immediately relate to the Nouriſhment and Support of his animal Life; and in avoiding other Things that may be noxious and hurtful; And, ſo far as his Preſervation is concern'd, he could receive no greater Advantage from a Viſion more perfect in its Kind: But, beſides, his Mind is entertain'd with the moſt agreeable and delightful Perceptions of Proportion, Beauty, Order and Harmony, and is furniſh'd with a ſufficient Stock of Ideas, about which to perform the various Operations of Comparing, Reaſoning, and the reſt; I ſay, a ſufficient Stock of Ideas, becauſe 'tis evident, a much greater would rather perplex than improve his Underſtanding: And indeed there is a ſurpriſing Conformity, of the Number of our Ideas and Perceptions, to the Strength of our Faculties that are given us to diſpoſe and range them into Order, and to retain them for future Uſe: And this Conformity,

mity, more than any Thing elſe, diſcovers the Wiſdom of the Author of our Nature, in framing and enduing us with ſuch a Number of Senſes, and theſe in ſuch Degrees: If therefore we attend either unto the Neceſſities of our animal Life, or unto the Strength of the Faculties of our Minds, we muſt diſcern the Fitneſs of our preſent Viſion, in the *Relation* and *Proportion* it bears unto both theſe. We are, next, to examine whether ſuch Purpoſes might be obtain'd, with equal Advantage, from a much higher Degree of the ſame Senſe.

II. Tho' we can't, in our preſent Situation, well underſtand how we ſhould feel ourſelves, in the Caſe of a much higher Degree of Senſe and Viſion, yet there is Ground for ſuch probable Conjectures as ought not to be neglected. We know, that preſently all the Senſes, Members and Parts of our Bodies, are adapted and approportion'd to each other, and, that any conſiderable Variation of any

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one of them, deſtroys the Beauty of the whole, and draws along with it ſome real Loſs or Inconvenience. A different Degree of Viſion, therefore, might require a different Structure to that Senſe; which, again, would require a different Size, Figure and Make to all others, in order to obtain and eſtabliſh a proper Harmony among them: And when we ſhould be inveſted with theſe new Bodies, they might, perhaps, not agree and correſpond to ſuch external Bodies as ſurround us, and which are ſo very ſuitable unto our preſent Frame and Conſtitution: And conſequently, theſe behoved to be adjuſted and modelled anew. In ſuch a Change, we don't know whether we ſhould be better or worſe, happier or more miſerable. Farther, a higher Degree of Senſe, as I have already hinted, would probably overſtock our Ideas and prove an Incumbrance, rather than a Help to our Underſtandings, and deſtroy that juſt Conformity that the Number of our Perceptions has to the Number and Strength of

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the Powers and Faculties of our Minds. Beſides, was this higher Degree of Viſion adapted to the viewing of very diſtant Objects, ſuch as the heavenly Bodies, it might be the leſs accommodated to thoſe Objects that are preſent; or, at leaſt, might divert our Attention too much, and make us negligent of ſuch Things as our Frame and Condition have made the neceſſary Objects of our conſtant Care and Concern. The ſame Conſequences would, probably, attend ſuch an acute Viſion, as might enable us to penetrate into the inmoſt Conſtitution of Bodies, and to perceive the Bulk, Texture and Motions of their inſenſible Parts: And, if the Ideas that would ariſe, ſhould be ſuppoſed to come in Place of thoſe Perceptions which we commonly call Taſtes, Smells, Sounds, *&c.* in that Caſe, we ſhould loſe our moſt agreeable Senſations, and, with them, all the Pleaſures of our animal Life. Now, theſe Conſiderations and Conjectures put together, appear to give a Probability, that any Degree

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of Viſion, much different from that which we preſently enjoy, would not ſufficiently ſerve all the neceſſary Uſes and Purpoſes mentioned under the firſt Article. We are next to examine what Account may be given, from theſe Obſervations, of the divine Management, in framing us with ſuch a Degree of Senſe and Viſion, as conveys into our Minds wrong Ideas and Perceptions of the Corporeal World.

III. Since our preſent Viſion ſerves all the neceſſary Uſes and Purpoſes in common Life; and beſides, furniſhes our Minds with a great many agreeable Perceptions, and with a Stock of Ideas for the Improvement of our Underſtandings: And ſince a much higher Degree of Viſion would not ſerve theſe Uſes and Purpoſes, with equal Advantage; the Fitneſs and Wiſdom of the divine Conduct in giving us ſuch a particular Degree of this Senſe, will therefore be *very apparent*: For allowing, that it conveys into our Minds

wrong Ideas and Repreſentations of Things, and particularly, gives a falſe Idea of the Syſtem of the World; yet, if the Diſadvantages of ſuch Perceptions, are over-ballanc'd by many real Advantages, and if theſe Advantages cou'd not be obtain'd, by ſuch a Degree of Senſe and Viſion as might enable us to perceive Things as they exiſt; or, which is the ſame Thing, if the Diſadvantages were unavoidable, upon the Suppoſition, that the Advantages were to be reach'd; then, I ſay, it will appear reaſonable and fit, for the ſake of theſe Advantages, to ſuffer ſuch Diſadvantages to happen: It would, indeed, be unworthy of the Supreme Being to convey into our Minds, any wrong Repreſentations of Things whatever, merely for the ſake of theſe Repreſentations themſelves; but to derive ſuch Ideas and Apprehenſions for the ſake of ſome Advantages of greater Importance unto us, is agreeable enough to all the Notions we can form of Wiſdom and Goodneſs: If therefore the Diſ-

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advantages of thoſe Perceptions may admit of a Compenſation, and may poſſibly be ballanced by ſomething *more beneficial* unto Mankind; then we ſhall have a probable Account of the divine Conduct in this Matter. Now, the Diſadvantage that is ſuppos'd to attend our preſent Viſion, is the falſe Idea of the Syſtem of the World, and the imperfect Notion of the great Creator, that ſome People imagine muſt ariſe in our Minds from ſuch a wrong Perception of his Works. If indeed, the Knowledge of the true Syſtem, was abſolutely neceſſary to diſcover the Exiſtence and Perfections of the firſt Cauſe; or if the Idea we have of the apparent Syſtem, neceſſarily produc'd in us very abſurd and unworthy Apprehenſions concerning the Deity; in both theſe Suppoſitions, the Loſs that Mankind ſhould ſuſtain would be irrepairable, and there ſhould be no probable Account to be given of the divine Conduct in allowing either the one or the other to happen. But neither of 'em

is the true Caſe; the apparent Syſtem itſelf affords an Argument, for the Being and Attributes of God; and beſides, there are other Things that appear unto our Senſes as they really are, and which are ſufficient Documents and Proofs for the ſame Purpoſe. Our own Make and Frame, the various Diſpoſitions and Inſtincts of brute Animals, and the Structure of Plants and Vegetables, loudly proclaim their Author, and carry in them the ſenſible Impreſſions of the inviſible Things of their Creator, even his eternal Power and Godhead. We may therefore conclude, that there can be no great Diſadvantages ariſing from the wrong Ideas we have of the Syſtem of the World; and if there be any, they muſt be ſuch as may be compenſated and ballanced by Advantages more beneficial and neceſſary unto Mankind.

THESE, and the like Conſiderations, may ſerve to give a probable Account of the divine Management in deriving into our Minds,

Minds, in a natural Way, wrong and unjuſt Perceptions of the Corporeal World. I ſhall put an End to this Enquiry, by making ſome ſhort Obſervations, in order to ſhew the Fitneſs of the divine Conduct in continuing the ſame Ideas by a Revelation.

I. The ſenſible Appearances of Things are ſo *ſtrong*, and *univerſal*, and the vulgar Perſwaſions, built upon them, ſo *deeply rooted*, that did a Revelation contradict them, it could not gain Belief or *Credit* in the World; the Propoſers of ſuch ſtrange Doctrines would be looked on as Madmen or Fools, who having forſaken the ſure Evidence and Teſtimony of their Senſes, had given themſelves up to the Conduct of a diſorder'd Fancy and Imagination. 'Tis eaſy to impoſe on the Credulity of moſt People, becauſe they are unapt to examine; but to convince them of any Thing where they ſee and feel the contrary, is the moſt difficult Task in the World, and what commonly fails of Succeſs: A Revela-

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tion therefore, however well ſupported by its own Excellence, and the miraculous Countenance of Heaven, could never prevail on the Aſſent of the Bulk of Mankind, were it directly inconſiſtent with their Senſe and Obſervation; ſuch Inconſiſtencies therefore being ſtrong Prejudices againſt the Belief of a divine Authority, it would be very unfit and improper to put them into a divine Revelation, were they not abſolutely neceſſary to carry on the main Deſign of the Book.

II. Suppoſe ſuch Things had been put into the ſacred Books, it is evident they could not ſerve any Purpoſe in *Religion*, which, in a *ſufficient Meaſure*, may not be reach'd by the other Way of propoſing the ſame Things: The Knowledge of the Frame, Fabrick and Mechaniſm of the Univerſe, is uſeful, as it inſpires into our Minds juſt and worthy Apprehenſions of the Deity; and to this Purpoſe 'tis only neceſſary we ſhould underſtand the various Influences of Things

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in promoting the Welfare of Mankind. Now of theſe we have ſufficient Information from common Senſe and Experience, without underſtanding the true Structure and State of Things, or the ſeveral Laws and Ordinances which they obſerve: Perhaps it may be enquired, ſince this is the Caſe, what Advantage then do we receive from Revelation in theſe Matters? I anſwer, That tho' in ſome Senſe we neceſſarily perceive the wiſe Uſes and Purpoſes of Things, yet we are very unapt to reflect upon them, ſo as to diſcern the Goodneſs and Deſign of their Author: The ſacred Books therefore are of no ſmall Uſe, as they furniſh us with a juſt Sett of Reflections of this Sort.

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